

Rulings Related to Celebrating the Birth of the Prophet ﷺ and the Classification and Identification of Innovations and Their Types

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Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ was asked concerning the ruling on *mawālīd* (celebrations of the Prophet's birth ﷺ) and *adhkār* (gatherings of Allāh's remembrance); whether they are a *sunnah* (recommendation), a virtuous act, or a *bid'ah* (innovation). The questioner added: "If you say that it is a virtuous act, then is there any *athar* (tradition) from the Salaf (pious predecessors) regarding its virtue, or any narration at all? And is gathering for permissible innovations allowed or not?"

The Imām رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ responded:

"Most *mawālīd* and *adhkār* that are carried out amongst us consist of good deeds such as charity, *dhikr*, sending salutations and peace upon the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, and mentioning his praise. However, they also contain evil, but rather many evils, even if it were to only include the exposure of women to non-related males (*ajānib*). While some of them do not contain evil, they are very few in number.

There is no doubt that the first type (those that contain both good and bad) is prohibited, due to the well-established legal maxim stating that repelling *maḥāsīd* (causes of evil) is given precedence over gaining *maṣāliḥ* (causes of good). Therefore, whoever knows that any evil shall occur in what he takes part in, he is disobedient and sinful. Even if we were to assume that he did some good in such a gathering, it is possible that its good does not outweigh its evil.

Do you not see that in good deeds, the legislator ﷺ sufficed with guiding us to doing what is easy, but when it came to bad, he restricted us from all of its types, when he said: ‘When I command you of something, do as much of it as you can, and when I forbid you from something, then stay away from it.’⁽¹⁾ Contemplate this, and you shall understand what I have previously established; that even a little amount of evil is not given any lenience, whereas what is easy to achieve is sufficient in good deeds.

As for the second type (those that do not contain evil), then it is a *sunnah*, and is supported by *aḥādīth* (prophetic traditions) related to general as well as specific forms of *dhikr*. For instance, the Prophet ﷺ said: ‘No group of people sits to remember Allāh عزَّوجلَّ except that the angels surround them, mercy covers them, tranquility descends upon them, and Allāh تبارك وتعالى mentions them to those in His presence.’⁽²⁾ This *ḥadīth* was transmitted by Muslim, and he also narrates that he ﷺ said to a group of people who were sitting and remembering Allāh عزَّوجلَّ, and praising Him for guiding them to Islam: ‘Jibrīl عليه الصلاة والسلام has come to me, and he has informed me that Allāh تبارك وتعالى boasts of you to the angels.’⁽³⁾

The two aforementioned traditions contain the clearest evidence for the virtue of gathering and sitting together for the cause of good, and that those who engage in it, likewise, are virtuous, for Allāh عزَّوجلَّ boasts of them to the angels, tranquility descends upon them, mercy covers them, and Allāh جلَّ وعلا mentions them among the angels عليهم السلام in praise, so what virtue is greater than such?

(1) Narrated by al-Bukhārī [7288], Muslim [1337].

(2) Narrated by Muslim [2700].

(3) Narrated by Muslim [2701].

As for the inquiry of the questioner whether it is allowed to gather for permissible innovations (*al-bida' al-mubāḥah*), then the answer is: yes, it is permissible. Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ said that an innovation (*bid'ah*) is any act that was not known during the time of the Prophet عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ, and that it is divided into five rulings (*aḥkām*), i.e. obligation (*wujūb*), recommendation (*nadb*), etc.⁽⁴⁾ The way to distinguish such is that the innovation be subjected to the principles of Sacred Law, so whichever ruling the innovation falls under, then it is of the same category.⁽⁵⁾

Hence, obligatory innovations include learning the science of syntax (*naḥw*), as it is required in understanding the Qurān and the Sunnah. Similarly, from the prohibited innovations is the belief of the Qadariyyah and their likes, and among the recommended innovations is establishing places of knowledge or gathering for the Tarāwīḥ prayer, whereas permissible innovations include shaking hands after prayer, and reprehensible innovations include overly decorating mosques and copies of the Qurān with anything other than gold, as it is prohibited otherwise.

It is stated in the *ḥadīth*, 'Every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Fire', but it is to be understood as referring to prohibited innovations only. If the gathering of *dhikr*, Tarāwīḥ prayer, etc., involves something prohibited, it is obligatory for anyone who has the ability to forbid it, and for others to refrain from attending, lest they become partners in sin. For this reason, the Shaykhān⁽⁶⁾ clearly stated that it is a sin to sit with evildoers, keeping them company.⁽⁷⁾

End quote, from al-Fatāwā al-Ḥadīthiyyah.⁽⁸⁾

(4) Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* 2/204.

(5) See also: al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wa al-Lughāt* 3/22.

(6) The term "Shaykhān" refers to al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) and al-Rāfi'ī (d. 623/1226).

(7) Refer to: al-Nawawī, al-Rawḍah 11/224, al-Rāfi'ī, al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr 13/8.

(8) Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-Ḥadīthiyyah* 109.